



Idaho's Safe Routes to School Program

Building a legacy for our children...

The statistics are startling. Only 30 years ago in the United States over 50% of all children either walked or biked to school. These students arrived at school alert and ready to learn. For many, half of their daily physical activity requirements had been met by the time they arrived at school. Today less than 20 percent walk or bike to school, a number that may continue to decline if not checked. This article was written to encourage you, as school administrators, to become acquainted with Safe Routes to School programs around the nation, urge you to work with citizens within your community to support these efforts, and to provide you with information that will help your school districts and communities apply for potential federal grants that will encourage the implementation of Safe Routes to School plans.

Safe Routes to School coalitions across the country have organized within the last five years to combat the decline in children walking and biking to school. These are diverse community coalitions, pulling together partnerships of school officials, teachers, parents, law enforcement and transportation agencies, city planners, community leaders, media, public health personnel, and even the students themselves. Their efforts may look very different from one community to another, but the goal is always the same—to improve the health of kids and the community by making walking and biking to school safer, easier, and more enjoyable.

The coalitions work to assess the safety of school travel routes; make changes such as improving crosswalks or adding crossing guards; educate students and drivers about safe travel, and encourage students to walk

and bike to school. Due to the involvement of diverse community members some programs expand to promote and improve safe walking and biking conditions throughout the community. To make walking and biking to school occur more frequently, major questions must be answered: Why are parents who live close to schools driving their

children to and from school every day? Are these parents creating the congestion around schools that is prompting even more parents to feel they cannot allow their children to walk and bike? Why are school districts busing children to school when they only live a few blocks away? Why are many parents afraid to let their

children travel independently, even for short distances? These and more issues can be successfully addressed by an effective Safe Routes to School coalition.

Issues that impact the safety and well being of children have proven to be popular rallying points for communities. Successful community-level efforts in Idaho have begun addressing these issues in such diverse areas such as Sandpoint, Boise, Pocatello, Twin Falls, and Hailey. Last fall the Idaho Transportation Department took the lead and organized a statewide Safe Routes to

School Advisory Group, in anticipation that the next federal highway act is likely to contain a Safe Routes to School Program. If the federal program is enacted (it is in both the U.S. House and Senate versions of the bill), your school districts and communities will be encouraged to participate in the grant application process. This new program will encourage the identification of changes which will make foot and pedal power a safer and more inviting means for students to travel to and from school.

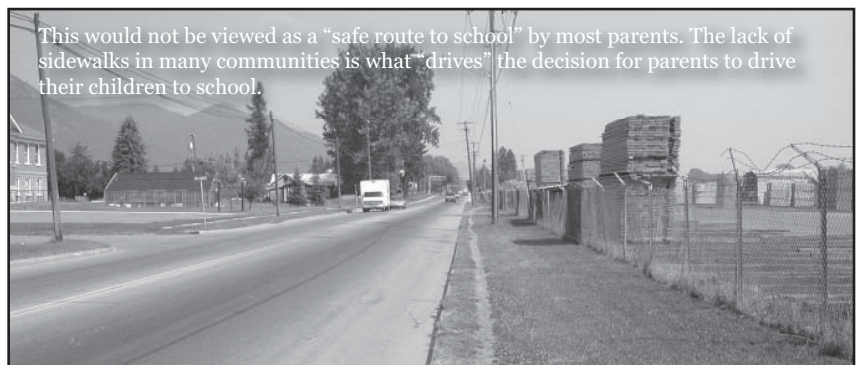
The Idaho Transportation Department is hosting the Idaho Safe Routes to School web site containing in-state, national, and international information. A downloadable Idaho Safe Routes to School brochure will be available as well as information to help your community organize an annual Walk to School Day and ongoing community-based walk-to-school efforts. All this information and more will be posted on www.itd.idaho.gov/bike_ped.htm

How can your school district or community best prepare for future Safe Routes to School grants?

- ☛ Go to the web site and learn how to identify conditions that prevent or hinder students from walking/cycling to school.
- ☛ Use the web site's information and links to educate your community leaders on the benefits of using calories to get to school rather than BTUs.
- ☛ Inform those within your community who may be willing to be leaders on this effort.
- ☛ Inform your local media about the Safe Routes to School Program and web site.



At Cecil D. Andrus Elementary in the Boise School District, Nancy Rush (not pictured) noticed that in her Boise neighborhood many children were being driven to school by parents even though the neighborhood was connected to the school grounds with walking paths. Nancy contacted each family and organized very successful adult-supervised "walking school buses" for the children who wanted to participate.



This would not be viewed as a "safe route to school" by most parents. The lack of sidewalks in many communities is what "drives" the decision for parents to drive their children to school.